

## **Gazette Opinion: SCHIP champions must keep fighting for kids**

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Hypocrisy looms large in the unnecessarily nasty opposition to the popular State Children's Health Insurance Program. President Bush and House members who abetted his veto claim that wealthy families are insuring their children, that adults shouldn't be covered, that a \$5 billion increase over five years is sufficient. They decry the tobacco tax increase and say insured families will move their children to SCHIP. All of these claims are false or grossly misleading. Anti-SCHIP forces choose to ignore these facts:

- The increase that Bush proposed for SCHIP would fall \$9 billion short of the \$14 billion that the Congressional Budget Office says is needed needed just to continue covering the 6.6 million people in the program now for the next five years.
- Ninety-two percent of SCHIP kids have family incomes below 200 percent of the poverty level.
- States that wanted to cover children from higher income families or cover any adults, including pregnant women, had to get a waiver from the Bush administration, which now complains that's a terrible thing.
- The vetoed bill would put new limits on enrollment of higher-income families and would phase out most adult enrollment.
- The vetoed bill proposes to cover most of the increased SCHIP spending with a 61-cent-per-pack increase in cigarette taxes. Unlike other new spending bills Bush has signed, this one won't add its entire cost to the national debt.
- The Bush administration favors tax credits for insurance coverage and has estimated that 61 percent of credit beneficiaries would otherwise have private coverage. The CBO estimates that 71 percent of seniors and disabled adults receiving the new Medicare prescription benefit already had prescription coverage. Compare those percentages to the CBO estimate that if 5.8 million children were added to SCHIP, 34 percent would have had private coverage. Creation of Medicare Part D made medicines affordable for millions of seniors, just as CHIP makes health insurance affordable for millions of children.
- The vetoed bill would authorize states to use CHIP money to pay the cost of dependent coverage for employer-sponsored insurance.

The federal government will spend about \$5 billion this year on SCHIP to cover 6 million children and some adults. The vetoed bill proposes to cover an additional 3.3 million children and cover the increasing costs of health care for a total cost of \$7 billion next year - less than 1 percent of federal health care spending.

Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., voted against the original House SCHIP bill, but he supported the less costly vetoed bill that was mostly written by the Senate Finance Committee chaired by Max Baucus, D-Mont. Sen. Jon Tester, D-Mont., also supports the vetoed bill. Unfortunately, their Wyoming counterparts don't.

Baucus is right to say he won't compromise on the number of children to be covered by CHIP. As the CBO told Baucus, around 6 million American children are uninsured and eligible for CHIP or Medicaid. These are the kids who need the bill that Bush vetoed. SCHIP champions must keep fighting for children's health.